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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

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TAGS: [ASEC](#) [SNAR](#) [EAID](#) [ETRD](#) [PGOV](#) [PE](#)

SUBJECT: THRUSH AIRCRAFT SEARCHES FOR OPIUM POPPIES AMID  
FUMIGATION ALLEGATIONS

REF: A) LIMA 2111  
B) LIMA 1062

1. (U) SUMMARY: Cocalero leader Elsa Malpartida has renewed the groundless rumors of GOP coca fumigation, this time citing the presence of a U.S. Thrush surveillance aircraft. To counter these allegations, the Mission continues a concerted public affairs effort that included a tour of the Thrush for journalists. The Mission is working to bring experts together to try to reach some common conclusions as to the extent of opium poppy. END SUMMARY.

2. U) Tingo Maria cocalero leader Elsa Malpartida traveled to the Tingo Maria airport on 5/17 with lawyers and press in tow, claiming that the U.S.-owned Thrush aircraft (Ref A) was fumigating coca fields. (Note: the Interior Ministry invited the Thrush to look for opium poppy fields. End Note.)

3. (U) To preempt Malpartida's renewed fumigation claims involving the Thrush, Embassy NAS and PAS supported a GOP Interior Ministry-organized visit for press and Malpartida to Tingo Maria on 5/19. The group was given a helicopter flight to see the area that the Thrush has been surveying as well as view the Thrush in flight.

4. (U) The visit resulted in significant coverage of opium poppy production in Peru. An extensive article in leading daily "La Republica" included photographs of the Thrush in flight. While noting that the Thrush could conduct fumigation operations, the article stressed the use in Peru for surveillance only as well as the growing problem of opium poppy cultivation and latex production. One reporter remained after the tour to gather information for the more extensive coverage of the opium problem in Peru, and it is unclear where she obtained the information leading to her headline describing an increase in opium cultivation to 2000 hectares in 2005, up from the GOP estimate of 1400 hectares a year earlier.

5. (SBU) COMMENT: The misinformed reporter may have made the poppy cultivation estimate by extrapolating from the amount of latex seized this year, or from the GOP's CADA agency maps. The reality is that no one knows the actual area under cultivation. The objective of the Thrush flights is to gather accurate, verifiable information on poppy production. As of May 23, no poppy fields have been located in the zones where the Thrush has done reconnaissance. On claims of opium poppy increases, the Mission is working with DEVIDA to set up a meeting, including counterdrug police DIRANDRO and other knowledgeable parties, to try to draw some common conclusions on the extent of opium poppy cultivation - so far, all figures come from thin air. END COMMENT.  
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